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ABSTRACT

Black graduate students (N=30) in a predominantly black state college in the southern part of the United States were surveyed regarding their personal aspirations and personal concerns. The aspirations of these black graduate students revolve around employment, a decent standard of living, owning a house, and having modern conveniences. Aspirations less typically mentioned include self-development or self-improvement and acceptance by others. Ill-health, accident, or death are the major forces identified as having a possible disruptive influence regarding attainment of aspirations. Several students mentioned a belief that benefits to be derived from their education would be enhanced if they did not have pressing financial problems. Additionally, they believed many operations of the college were decided in favor of administrative convenience rather than for the benefit of students. (Author)

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PATTERNS OF BLACK GRADUATE STUDENTS' CONCERNS IN A BLACK COLLEGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE	1
II.	PROCEDURE AND METHOD	5
III.	ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	9
IV.	CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	14
	ABSTRACT	i
	LIST OF TABLES	iii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	iv
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	17

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1	PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS.	9
2	PERSONAL CONCERNS	10
3	ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR FAMILIES.	10
4	CONCERN FOR THEIR FAMILIES	11
5	LADDER RATING.	11

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX		PAGE
1	CODING SYSTEM	19

I. THE PROBLEM IN PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this research was to investigate/identify the personal aspirations and concerns of black graduate students in a black southern state college.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that: ". . . in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment" (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Thus came to an end the "separate but equal" doctrine practiced in the field of public education in the United States. Educational successes by blacks since that decision have been extensive and have contributed to increased hopes and aspirations regarding improvements in standards of living and the opening-up of even greater opportunities for blacks.

Cantril (1965) writes that the black population in the United States senses real progress is being made toward their goal of equality. However, rising educational standards for job acceptance present a potential barrier to a continued

improvement in employment opportunities for blacks. As Samuel D. Proctor (1958) puts it: ". . . at the very moment that the country has begun to show keen awareness of the problem of preparing Negroes for better jobs, and at the time when the Negroes are making their strongest bid for equal consideration, we find the standards creeping higher and higher and our capacity to prepare our (black) students is not improving commensurately." Employment opportunities are currently being expanded for black youth in professional and other service areas (U.S. Supreme Court, 1979). This trend, in turn, demands quality education for blacks to sustain existing job opportunities.

Peter E. Holmes (1973), Director, Office for Civil Rights, Health, Education and Welfare, extended the 1954 Supreme Court decision by requiring several Southern university systems to submit "A Plan for the Integration of the University System," and "Individual Plans for Further Integration." The request includes only those institutions which are publicly financed. Extension of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, many believe, will negate advantages that have accrued to blacks to this point in time, especially, if black colleges and universities desegregate to the degree of losing their black identity (Payne, 1978).

As desegregation of institutions of higher learning progresses, there are those who propose that the quality of education in black colleges will deteriorate. Their reasoning, usually, is as follows. With desegregation, qualified black college and university professors leave predominently black institutions for better paying white institutions. By the same token, unfortunately, brighter black students leave black institutions and attend more attractive white institutions because they obtain financial assistance as well as quality education. In turn, this situation deprives the average black student in black colleges of association with brighter black students (Broom & Glenn, 1966).

In conclusion, more research attention has been directed to the concerns of black students in predominantly white colleges (Cummings, 1949; Ragland, 1956; Berry, 1956; Boyd, 1977; Cunningen, 1978; Middleton. 1978; & Clark, 1963). To date few studies have been conducted on black students' concerns in predominantly black colleges (Thompson, 1956). An increasing emphasis on the identity of the black colleges has made it necessary to discover the concerns of black graduate students in a predominantly black state college. An identification of needs and concerns of these students make it possible to develop means of

fulfilling these needs since there is much yet to be done (Wilhelm, 1970).

II. PROCEDURE AND METHOD

Subjects (N=30) were selected at random from a black graduate student population of 95 (total full-time and part-time).

A Self-Anchoring Striving Scale was used to uncover the limits and boundaries of aspirations set by internalized social norms, by the group identifications that students develop in their particular social milieu and which serve as subjective standards for satisfaction or frustration (see Appendix-for coding system). Each student was asked to define, on the basis of his assumptions, perceptions, goals, and values the two extremes on which some scale measurement is desired; for example, he may be asked to define the "good" and "bad." This self-defined continuum was used as a measuring device. The actual questions are given below:

1. (A) All of us want certain things out of life. When you think about what really matters in your life, what are your wishes and hopes for the future? In other words, if you imagine your future in the best possible light, what would your life look like then, if you are to be happy? Take your time in answering; such things aren't easy to put into words.

Permissible Probe: What are your hopes for the future? What would your life have to be like for you to be completely happy? What is missing for you to be happy?

Obligatory Probe: Anything else?

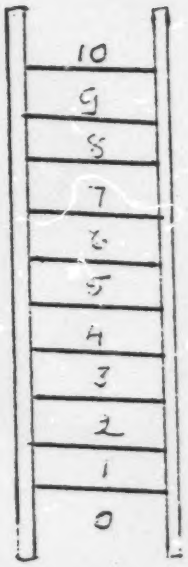
(B) Now, taking the other side of the picture, what are your fears and worries about the future? In other words, if you imagine your future in the worst possible light, what would your life look like then? Again, take your time in answering.

Obligatory Probe: What would make you unhappy?

Later, utilizing a nonverbal ladder device, the student was asked where he would rank himself on the ladder today, with the top being the best possible life as he has defined it. He was also asked where he thinks he will rank in the future.

Specific instructions were as follows:

Here is a picture of a ladder. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder (pointing) represents the best possible life for you and the bottom (pointing) represents the worst possible life for you. (Ten point scale).



(C) Where on the ladder (moving fingers up and down the ladder) do you feel you personally stand at the present time? Step number_____.

(D) Where on the ladder would you say you stood five years ago? Step number_____.

(E) And where do you think you will be on the ladder five years from now? Step number_____.

Verbatim reports were taken in the personal interviews with the students. Later, the reports were analyzed and

coded according to the coding system given in the appendix.

In dealing with concerns, the code moves outward in terms of wider horizons of awareness and concern, from items having to do with family or self, to items involving other people and the community.

III. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

What were some of the personal aspirations and personal concerns of black graduate students in a black southern college? A content analysis of student responses to the Self-Anchoring Striving Scale revealed a tendency for students to report not only personal aspirations and personal concerns but also aspirations and concerns for family.

Tables 1 and 2, graphically illustrate reported personal aspirations and personal concerns, respectively.

TABLE 1

PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations	Percent
Employment	47
Improved or decent standard of living	42
Have own house	36
Have modern convenience, car, swimming pool	26
Self-development or self-improvement	15
Have wealth	8
Acceptance by others	2
Own land or farm	1
Good health	1

TABLE 2

PERSONAL CONCERNS

Concerns	Percent
Ill-health, accident, death	8
Deterioration or inadequate standard of living.	5
Unemployment.	1
No further study.	1

Tables 3 and 4 graphically illustrate reported aspirations and concerns for family, respectively.

TABLE 3

ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR FAMILIES

Aspirations	Percent
Happiness for parents and relatives.	4
Decent standard of living for the family . .	1

TABLE 4

CONCERNS FOR THEIR FAMILIES

Concerns	Percent
Ill-health, accident, death in the family.	3
Unhappiness for parents, brothers and sisters. . .	2

The distribution of the ladder ratings (Table 5) given by the students for the past and the present are around the mid-point of the best possible-worst possible life continuum. The rating given for the future is more optimistic and encouraging. Students believe the condition of black educated people in the United States has improved and will continue to improve in the future. They are sure that the future will be bright for themselves and their race.

TABLE 5

LADDER RATING

Time Span	Rating
Five years ago	5.1
Present time	6.7
Five years from now.	8.3

DISCUSSION

According to the data, aspirations of these black graduate students most typically revolve around employment, a decent standard of living, owning a house, and having modern conveniences. Aspirations, less typically mentioned, include self-development or self-improvement and acceptance by others. It appears, then, that dominant aspirations are related to Maslow's (1954) lower level needs, i.e. physiological and safety needs. Maslow's higher level needs, i.e. a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization are conspicuously under identified by this sample of students. Further support for the foregoing may be indicated by the one major concern most typically reported. Ill-health, accident, or death are the major forces identified as having a possible disruptive influence regarding attainment of aspirations.

If this group of students is concerned about potential disruptive influences of further integration of schools of higher learning, it was not evident. The youth in this group appear to be optimistic with regard to future opportunities in American culture.

Although not a formal part of this investigation, additional observations emanating from student interviews were that students desired more financial assistance and wanted the college to be more student-centered. Several students reported a belief that benefits to be derived from their education would be enhanced if they did not have pressing financial problems. In addition, they believe many operations of the college are decided in favor of administrative convenience rather than for the benefit of students.

IV. CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

A descriptive investigation was conducted to facilitate the identification of black graduate students' aspirations and concerns in a black southern college. Aspirations and concerns reported by this sample of students are comparable to basic needs levels as identified by Maslow (1954). In addition, students feel neglected by the educational system that serves them. However, most students remain optimistic about potential future attainments.

A Self-Anchoring Striving Scale provided adequate stimulus items to elicit responses regarding any identity crisis that predominantly black colleges may be experiencing or will experience in the future. Items 31, 32, and 33 which deal with hope of improvement or fear of conflict by racial integration, improved or deteriorating academic standards in predominantly black schools, and desire or lack of desire for full school integration, respectively, did not elicit concerns from this sample of students.

What implications may be reasonably derived from the present study? Racial identity of black colleges may not be a substantive issue as perceived by most black students. It appears that black students anticipate potential benefits

to be derived from their educational pursuits regardless of the racial identity of the college.

It is interesting to note that this sample of students is operating at more basic needs levels. College administrators and faculty need to be more cognizant of this situation. As faculty attempts to motivate students to greater achievement, they need to recognize the necessity of establishing for these students a relevance between their academic activities and fulfillment of needs as perceived by the students.

Administrators need to make an effort to dispel student ignorance regarding the operations of the college. If students are knowledgeable regarding factors influencing operations of the college, greater support for the college may be engendered. At a minimal level, student attitudes may not be so negative. Negative bias on the part of students may lead to resistance to educational offerings which can be self-defeating to a great extent.

Finally, college financial assistance offices need to be more aggressive in acquiring the greatest amount of financial aid for every needy student. Subsistence level financial aid does not accomplish the intended purposes of such student support. Financial aid should enable the student to fully

direct his mind and efforts toward achieving the greatest possible benefit from his education. Currently, this does not appear to be the case.

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APPENDIX

CODING SYSTEM

PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS; PERSONAL CONCERNS

Concerned with Self &/or Family

.....(A)	.....(B)
1. Emotional stability and maturity--peace of mind, mental health and well-being; sense of humor, understanding of others, etc., harmonious life.	1. Emotional instability and immaturity--lack of peace of mind, of mental health or well-being; no sense of humor or understanding of others, etc., life of disharmony.
2. Be normal, decent person--leading quiet life, harming no one.	2. Become anti-social; take to crime.
3. Self-development or improvement--opportunity for independence of thought and action, for following through with own interests, further study; reading for non-leisure purposes; no "rut".	3. No self-development or improvement--getting in a "rut" no opportunity for independence of thought and action, for following through with own interests; no further study or reading, etc.
4. Acceptance by others--	4. Not be accepted by others--

recognition of my status by others; to be liked, respected or loved (exception: where reference is restricted to family or marriage, code under different head).	recognition of my status by others; not to be liked respected, or loved.
5. Achieve sense of my own personal worth--self-satisfaction; feeling of accomplishment; lead a purposeful life.	5. No sense of personal worth--feel personally inadequate; unable to achieve aspirations as to occupation or role in life; feel worthless, have no purpose in life.
6. Resolution of one's own religious, spiritual, or ethical problems.	6. To be a person without character.
7. To lead a desciplined life.	7. Miscellaneous worries and fears regarding one's own personal character.
8. Miscellaneous aspirations regarding one's own personal character.	
Nothing to code in this column.	Nothing to code in this column.

Personal Economic Situation

9. Improved or decent standard of living for self or family; sufficient money to live decently; freedom from debt; make ends meet; relief from poverty; not suffer want, hunger, etc.

10. Have own business, ability to increase or expand one's business.

11. Have own land or own farm.

12. Have own house, apartment or garden; or get better ones.

13. Have modern conveniences, such as a car, bathroom, fine or new furniture, fine clothes, large appliances such as washing machine, radio, television, etc.,

8. Deterioration in or inadequate standard of living for self or family; not sufficient money to live better or to live decently; debt; poverty; suffer want, hunger, etc.

9. Miscellaneous worries and fears having to do with the economic situation of self or family.

10. No jewelry.

14. Have wealth--money to do anything I/we wish.

15. Miscellaneous aspirations having to do with economic situation of self or family.

16. Want jewelry.

Job or Work Situation

17. Good job, congenial work for self, spouse, or other family member; independence in choice of occupation; chance of advancement.

11. Poor job, uncongenial work for self; spouse, or other family member; no independence in choice of occupation; unpleasant, uninteresting job or work situation; no chance for advancement.

18. Employment--steady work for self, spouse, or other family member.

12. Unemployment--no steady work for self, spouse, or other family member; inability to find or hold a job; unable to work because of sickness.

19. Success in one's work for self, spouse, or other

13. Failure in one's work for self, spouse, or other

family member; make a contribution to one's field.

20. Miscellaneous aspirations regarding job or work situation.
Nothing to code under this column.

Other References to "Self"

21. One's own health--continued or regained health (physical or mental) for self; strength to enjoy life).

22. Recreation, travel, leisure time; sports, reading for pleasure etc.

23. Miscellaneous aspirations involving other references to "self".

24. Good husband/wife.

family member; contribute little or nothing to one's field.

14. Miscellaneous worries and fears regarding job or work situation.
Nothing to code under this column.

15. To be dependent on others.

16. Bad husband/wife.

17. Fear of nuclear war.

18. Destruction of self due to pollution.

19. Fear of old age.
20. Fear of getting fat.
21. Fear of loneliness in life.
22. Divorce.
23. Racial descrimination
24. Drug addiction.
25. Miscellaneous worries and fears involving other references to "self".

Nothing to code under this column.

Nothing to code under this column.

Other References to Family

25. Happy family life--pleasant home; love within family, happy marriage.

26. No or unhappy family life--no marriage or unhappy marriage; no home or unhappy home; no love within family.

26. Relatives--concern for parents, or other relatives; be close to them; keep them together again; help or take care of them; live up to their expectations.

27. Relatives--separation from parents, or other relatives; not to be able to help or take care of them; not to live up to their expectations.

27. Health of family--continued good health or improved health for members of family.

28. Miscellaneous aspirations regarding family.

28. Ill-health, accident, death, or continued poor health for members of family.

29. Fight with brothers or relatives.

30. Miscellaneous worries and fears regarding family--enemies.

Other References to Racial Situations

Concern with "Self"

.....A

29. Desire to be accepted by Caucasians (understanding and positive relationships).

30. Desire to be accepted by blacks (understanding and positive relationships).

31. Hope of improvement by racial integration; unity

.....B

31. Fear of not being accepted by Caucasians (Little understanding and negative relationships).

32. Fear of not being accepted by blacks (little understanding and negative relationships).

33. Fear of conflict faced by racial integration; (facing

and feelings of working for common goals for the good of all peoples.

approach-approach, avoidance-avoidance, and approach-avoidance feelings).

32. Improved or higher academic standards in predominantly black schools.

34. Little improvement of academic standards in predominantly black schools.

33. Desire for full school integration.

35. Little desire for school integration.